

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 10998

FOLLOWING TELEGRAM BEING REPEATED FOR YOUR ACTION/INFO:
SENT ACTION BANGKOK,INFO VIENTIANE ON (P 150400Z APR 78)

QUOTE:

C O N F I D E N T I A L UDORN 0094

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF TH LA
SUBJECT: NONG KHAI GOVERNOR COMMENTS ON REFUGEE
SITUATION

REF: UDORN 0090

1. DURING INFORMAL LUNCH WITH NONG KHAI GOVERNOR
CHAMNAN POTCHANA EARLIER THIS WEEK HE MADE FOLLOWING
COMMENTS TO CONSUL REGARDING REFUGEE SITUATION.

2. CURRENT REFUGEE INFLUX - GOVERNOR CHAMNAN ESTIMATES
FIVE TO SEVEN THOUSAND REFUGEES WILL ENTER NONG KHAI
PROVINCE DURING REMAINDER OF CY1978. HE EXPECTS THAT A
LARGE NUMBER, PERHAPS MORE THAN HALF, WILL BE
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HMONG HILLSTRIBESMEN HE STATED THAT LOCAL AUTHORITIES
WILL CONTINUE TO PERMIT HMONG REFUGEES TO ENTER
PROVINCE AS LONG AS THEY ARE SUBJECT TO LPDR/SRV
SUPPRESSION OPERATIONS.

3. GOVERNOR CHAMNAN STATED THAT LOWLAND LAO REFUGEES,
INCLUDING THAI DAM, VIET-LAO, AND SINO-LAO, CONTINUE TO

CROSS INTO PROVINCE DESPITE NOVEMBER 15, 1977 EXCLUSIONARY POLICY. WHILE NUMBERS OF THESE REFUGEES ARE SUBSTANTIALLY LOWER THAN LAST YEAR IT HAS PROVED IMPOSSIBLE TO STOP INFLUX COMPLETELY.

4. GOVERNOR CHAMNAN COMPLAINED THAT MOI OFFICIALS IN BANGKOK WHO TELL HIM TO RETURN SUCH REFUGEES TO LAOS DO NOT UNDERSTAND REALITIES OF SITUATION. HE SAID THAT SOME LOWLAND LAO REFUGEES CAN BE PERSUADED TO GO BACK BUT GREAT MAJORITY REFUSE. HIS SUBORDINATES'S EFFORTS TO FORCIBLY REPATRIATE SUCH REFUGEES ARE NOT PROVING VERY SUCCESSFUL, HE NOTED, BECAUSE IN MANY CASES LPDR AUTHORITIES DO NOT ACCEPT RETURNED REFUGEES OR REFUGEES ELUDE LPDR AUTHORITIES, SUCH AS BY JUMPING INTO MEKONG RIVER, AND FLEE AGAIN TO THAILAND.

5. GOVERNOR CHAMNAN ALSO POINTED OUT THAT REPATRIATION OPERATIONS CAN SOMETIMES BE RISKY BECAUSE HIS AUTHORITY ONLY EXTENDS TO MID-CHANNEL OF MEKONG. HE SAID THAT ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS WHEN LOCAL OFFICIALS ATTEMPTED TO FORCIBLY RETURN REFUGEES, LATTER PANICKED AS BOAT NEARED LAO SHORE AND HURLED THEMSELVES INTO RIVER. THIS ATTRACTED ATTENTION OF TRIGGER HAPPY LPDR BORDER PATROLS WHO OPENED FIRE ON REFUGEES ENDANGERING THAI OFFICIALS IN BOAT. GOVERNOR CHAMNAN NOTED THAT, IN SUM, IT IS UNREALISTIC FOR MOI TO EXPECT LOCAL OFFICIALS TO

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SUCCESSFULLY RETURN UNWANTED REFUGEES TO LAOS IN ABSENCE OF AN AGREEMENT BY RTG MFA WITH LPDR AUTHORITIES ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE PROCEDURES FOR SUCH OPERATIONS.

6. REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN NONG KHAI - GOVERNOR CHAMNAN STATED HE IS PERSONALLY CONVINCED THAT PART OF SOLUTIONS TO REFUGEE PROBLEM IS TO RESETTLE SOME OF REFUGEES IN THAILAND. HE SAID THAT HE SENT A PROPOSAL TO MOI SUGGESTING RESETTLEMENT OF FIVE TO TEN THOUSAND LOWLAND LAO AND HMONGS IN PHON PHISAI DISTRICT NEARLY A YEAR AGO BUT HAS NEVER RECEIVED A CLUEAR RESPONSE. HE ASKED CONSUL TO REQUEST US AMBASSADOR IN BANGKOK TO EXERT HIS INFLUENCE TO OBTAIN MOI POSITIVE REPLY TO HIS RESETTLEMENT PROJECT. HE ALSO EXPRESSED HOPE THAT USG WOULD BE ABLE TO PROVIDE MATERIAL SUPPORT TO PHON PHISAI RESETTLEMENT VENTURE WHICH, HE ADDED, WOULD BE DESIGNED TO BENEFIT THAI POPULATION IN AREA AS WELL.

7. REFUGEE VOCATIONAL TRAINING - GOVERNOR CHAMNAN NOTED THAT THERE IS REAL NEED IN NONG KHAI CAMP FOR GREATLY EXPANDED VOCATIONAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFUGEES,

PARTICULARLY MALES. HE VOICED HOPE THAT VOLAGS WOULD BE ABLE TO PROVIDE INCREASED ASSISTANCE TO HELP WOTH THIS PROBLEM.

8. PUBLICIZING REFUGEE SITUATION - GOVERNOR CHAMNAN STATED THAT HE IS ATTEMPTING TO ORGANIZE AN HOUR LONG TELEVISION PROGRAM ON KHON KAEN'S TV-5 TO EXPLAIN REFUGEE SITUATION TO NORTHEAST POPULACE. ONE OF PROGRAM'S AIMS WOULD BE TO DEMONSTRATE WHY REFUGEES CONTINUE TO FLEE LAOS. PROGRAM WILL FEATURE FOUR REFUGEE REPRESENTATIVES, TWO MEN AND TWO WOMEN, GOVERNOR CHAMNAN AND TV-5 INTERVIEWER.

9. COMMENT: BASED ON GOVERNOR CHAMNAN'S COMMENTS ABOVE
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OUR CONCERN NOTED PARA 4 REFTTEL SEEMS UNFOUNDED. GOVERNOR DISPLAYED IN GENERAL A RATHER RELAXED ATTITUDE TOWARDS CURRENT LEVEL OF REFUGEE INFLUX INTO HIS PROVINCE. WE DETECTED NO SIGN THAT HE MAY BE CHANGING HIS MIND ABOUT WISDOM OF PERMITTING HMONGS TO SEEK REFUGE AT PHON PHISAI AND BUNG KAN. HE ALSO SEEMED RESIGNED TO FACT THAT CERTAIN NUMBER OF LOWLAND LAO, PERHAPS SEVERAL HUNDRED A MONTH, ARE GOING TO ENTER PROVINCE REGARDLESS OF EFFORTS BY LOCAL OFFICIALS TO DISCOURAGE THEM. FINALLY, LIMITED EFFECTIVENESS OF RTG'S EXCLUSIONARY POLICY SEEMS TO HAVE STRENGTHENED HIS BELIEF THAT AFTER THREE YEARS OF CONFINING REFUGEES TO NONG KHAI CAMP, RTG SHOULD BEGIN TO MOVE SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF THAM OUT OF CAMP INTO RESETLEMENT SITES WHERE THEY CAM BECOME PRODUCTIVE.

FINNEY

UNQUOTE:

WHITEHOUSE

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NNN

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